

Letter from Taizé

BIMONTHLY 3.50 FF

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APRIL MAY 1988 / 2
Graduate Theological Union

MAR 08 1988

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At the end of this year:
An intercontinental meeting
in MADRAS
and a European meeting



The Christian community in Rome welcomes you and wishes to open its heart to you, as it has opened its arms. You have come to Rome to meet the living Jesus, in the communion and friendship of many brothers united in prayer." *Cardinal Poletti, Vicar of the Pope for the city of Rome.*

30th December 1987 - 2nd January 1988: It wasn't a week like all the others for the Christian communities of the city of Rome who had welcomed young Europeans of every tongue, from the north and the south, and also 5,000 from Eastern Europe, including for the first time a thousand Hungarians. 250 parishes opened widely their doors and bent over backwards to lodge and accompany these pilgrims who had chosen to spend the end of the year in this way. Sleeping with families on the floor in classrooms transformed into dormitories, picnicking on the squares outside the basilicas, meeting together at midday and in the evening in the three largest churches of the city to pray, sing, and meditate in silence, spending their mornings in the parishes that welcomed them: Spanish, Danish, Slovenes, Germans, Hungarians in one such parish; Portuguese, Croats, Scottish, Finnish, Polish, Italians in another, reflecting with their Roman hosts upon the theme: "inner life and human solidarity".

This European Meeting, the third at Rome, the tenth in all, was very much marked by the presence of young Asians, Africans, South Americans, especially invited to spend some weeks in Taizé, then in Rome, and finally to visit young Europeans in their parishes and local communities.

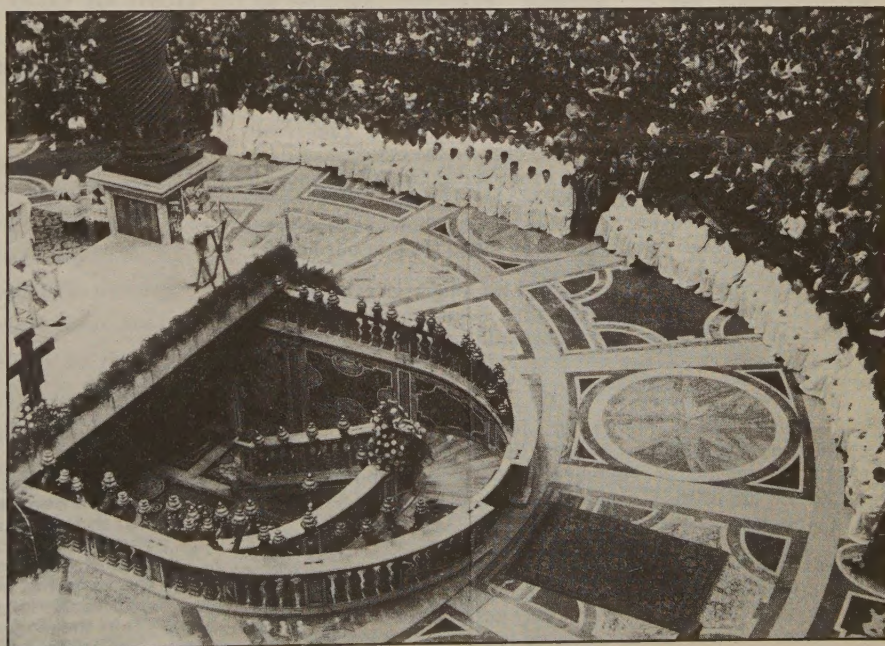
Many young people who are attentive to the Church," said Brother Roger, "know that Christ in the Mystery of Communion and that the Church is being forsaken in vast regions of Europe. For centuries, the Gospel has been transmitted mainly from Europe.

This year, it appeared essential that young Christians from the Southern continents come to bring the Gospel in its freshness, in visiting these communities of communities which are the parishes. And all of us, what are we preparing ourselves for? For a springtime of the Church, in Europe as elsewhere."

The Pope understood very well the trust in God and in the young that are so characteristic of the meetings in Taizé. It was in the same tone that on 30th December he addressed the young people in a packed St. Peter's Basilica:

"It is because I share that trust and that hope that I wanted to stop in Taizé during my last pastoral visit to France last year. These days, dear young people, you are the ones stopping in Rome during your "pilgrimage of trust on earth". You have chosen to stop here, to meet the Pope and the faithful of his diocese, and to pray with them in these places where the apostles Peter and Paul shed their blood out of faithfulness to Christ. It is a joy and an encouragement for us to receive you."

In his message, the Pope said that he was worried by the same preoccupations as the young people; lack of unity among Christians, suffering of victims of famine and armed conflicts, abuse of human rights, the future of young people and of humanity.



"I too am called to be a pilgrim of trust in the name of Christ," he added. "I ask you to pray for me." The tone was simple, warm and accessible to all. His message concluded an hour of prayers and songs in several languages. The 30,000 young people and their hosts had stayed crowded, cramped and standing in the basilica, singing, attentive and recollected.

When the lights went out in the basilica, the doors poured forth a multicoloured stream onto the square where night had fallen. Like each evening, the 16 vans of the meal distribution were waiting, arranged in line, filled with white plastic bags and tinfoil trays in which were the meals (in one week 240,000 meals were distributed in this way). For the space of an hour, St. Peter's Square took on the image, never seen before, of an immense camp in joyful dance, until John Paul II, like the welcoming head of the household, came to his window: "Buona notte a tutti!"

St. Peter's basilica, 30th December 1987. "Most Holy Father, we are all very happy to be here with you and to pray at the heart of this unique communion which is the Church." (Brother Roger) "The Pope feels deeply committed with you in this 'pilgrimage of trust on earth'". (Pope John Paul II)

Pilgrims welcomed at Rome...



"Each day during the European Meeting, I saw the three great churches of St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major and St. Mary of the Angels transform themselves. In the morning, they were sights, beautiful historic monuments. At midday and in the evening, they suddenly became living churches, paved with young people in prayer". A priest from Lebanon.

The invisible presence of Christ in you.

For reflection or discussion on the first part of the Letter from Ethiopia, here is a presentation of a Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 4.6-10. (This passage was used in one of the workshops offered at Rome.)

"God is present for each human being". The apostle Paul recalls the first word of God at the creation of the universe: "From darkness, let light shine forth". Light witnesses to God's presence. In the Scriptures, it is a symbol of the goodness of God who gives life to all creatures. The light which our eyes see shows us in advance the Light of Christ. By him, "God has shone forth in our hearts".

"Perhaps this fire is under ashes and no longer gives light". We carry the treasure of the Gospel within us in "clay jars". Our life can seem so insignificant that, forgetting the hidden treasure, Christ who lives in us, we are tempted to go and search for it elsewhere.

"Baptism had been the mark of an invisible presence." Saint Paul describes the trials of his Christian life. But, united with Christ through baptism, he can say that his sufferings are those of Jesus, and that the life of the Risen Christ is his life too. are tempted to go and search for it elsewhere.

What are the marks and signs that help me to discern the invisible presence of Christ in others and in myself? Where can the courage not to flee from the poverty of the clay jars that we are, but to love the treasure which is placed there, be found?

"How can we search for the most essential during these days in Rome? What we can all hope for is to discover how to give our trust to God and his Christ. And how can we find the vitality to do this right to the end of our life?

Many say to themselves: I have so little trust, I have so little faith, not even as much as a little mustard seed.

I would like to reply to each person: this trust, however small, is enough for you. So go forward. You already have everything in order to live from Christ.

And behold, you discover that Jesus, the Risen One, comes for each human being for those who know him as for those who don't yet know him. He is very close to you, he is in you. He affirms this in his Gospel: My Kingdom, which is to say my life, is within you.

So, you will reply to him: Jesus, you who love me, do not look upon my sins but on the faith of your Church, of all those who trust you, from Mary and the Apostles right up to all of us today.

From now on, from this evening, wherever you are, may your heart rejoice: the Kingdom of God is amongst us."

Brother Roger in Rome

In the catacombs, to pray in communion with those who have gone before us in the faith and who went on to the very end in their "yes" to Christ, leads us on in the way of the gift of our life.



..... to the living springs of faith to live a

Someone suggested that I say something about a "yes" for life, and about how I understood this when I was your age. When the decision to make a commitment for my whole life became clear, I only had one reply to give: "I know that by myself I don't have the strength, but I know even more that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Risen Christ, is strong enough, he will give me day after day that which is necessary, the inner ability to hold on until the death, until everlasting life".

I was conscious that I wasn't entering upon an easy path. When I was very young, I was already certain that great things are not created by taking easy ways out. I felt that God calls each person to be a creator with him, among other things to be a creator of trust and human solidarity.

In the Gospel, there is a story which recalls the "yes" for life: when the boat is caught in a storm, the apostle Peter sees Jesus on the lake: wanting to join him, Peter steps out of the boat, but he is frightened of sinking into the water: Christ says only one word to him: "Come".

Jesus says this "come" to us all our lives. And when temptations arise, which Jesus has already known, he is there to pull us away from this trial and says again to us "come"...

Brother Roger in Rome

"To be a pilgrim of the trust of Christ, it is essential to accomplish an inner pilgrimage each day within ourselves, searching for the light of Christ, going to meet the person of Christ, who in the peace of prayer makes himself a pilgrim with us. Meditating on his Word, we are able to understand to which point he loves us. At the same time we become conscious that he isn't alone, that we can and we must love him in his Body of which he is the Head as Saint Paul affirms (cf. Col 1.18). This Body is the Church of which we become members by baptism, and where the love of Christ unites us and encourages us by the word of God and the sacraments. We also come to understand that Christ sends us out to announce the Good News to others, which means to everyone, he who is the friend of all men and women and consequently wishes for their salvation."

The Pope John Paul II at St. Peter's

ADJEBOUCH is Ethiopian. She is suffering from leprosy and has had both legs amputated. Mother of several children, she was abandoned by her husband when her illness began eleven years ago. Brother Roger met her on Christmas Day in Addis Abeba. All around her she radiates trust of heart and the courage of a faith that is rare.



1988 Gandhi Prize

On January 1st each year, the Gandhi Prize, created at the time of the intercontinental meeting in Madras, is given to often hidden and even unknown people, who consecrate themselves to the establishment of trust among peoples and through trust, to peace. In the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, a young Haitian and a child announced the names of three people from three continents who had been awarded the 1988 Gandhi Prize (which carries no gift of money).

JERZY TUROWICZ, from Cracow took part in the Polish resistance during World War II. He is the founder (1945) and became the main writer of a Polish catholic weekly, known for its strong and firm positions, called "Tygodnik Powszechny". A man of dialogue and great openness, he has always searched to understand new ways of thought and to defend, without compromise, basic human rights. 75 years of age this man, discrete, of great honesty, and great generosity, is a reference point, even a master, for numerous Polish intellectuals. His unshakeable trust in the human person, his universal heart, his concern for communion between people of different horizons, have lead him not to spare any effort in opening paths of reconciliation between persons and peoples, in particular between the Polish people and neighbouring peoples.



MARGARETTE JULIEN is 26 years old and from Haiti. Inhabited by a love for the poorest of her people, she knows how to give of herself in situations that are full of risk. From the death of her parents, she has lived in a shanty town of Port au Prince. There, she animates small "basic church communities" where deepening of the faith and prayer are inseparable from human solidarities in everyday life.



commitment at the heart of the Church ...

In Ethiopia

Just before the European Meeting last December, Brother Roger went to Ethiopia. For the past few years, the people there have been going through great trials. There is the threat of a new famine because the drought has destroyed the harvest in several provinces. The Ethiopians are one of the greatest and most ancient Christian peoples of Africa. Traditions of prayer and pilgrimage are alive. A hundred Orthodox monasteries are the focus of the life of faith. It is also the Christians, who are undertaking, with little means, the large task of aid to the poorest of the poor: food distribution, care of children suffering from malnutrition, welcome of families of lepers... It is to help this emergency relief that an appeal has been launched: 300 dollars is enough to support a family for a year.



Gifts can be sent to the following addresses:
UK: "Operation Hope", Bank Account no. 44495090, Coutts and Co., Duncannon Branch, 440 Strand, LONDON WC2R 0QS. • USA: "Operation Hope", c/o Taizé, 413 W. 48th Street, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036. • IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA, etc.: gifts can be sent in the same way as sums for subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope".

"You know little of Christ, but if you can communicate to others what you have understood, your heart grows larger.

If all of you, as soon as you get home, without delay, would set off with the very little that you have understood of the Gospel, if all of you took this risk in order to make possible a continuity of Christ, in the face of many people's indifference, then your heart will be opened through different stages and you will become fully alive. If we were all to set off like this, we could animate a new springtime of the Church."

Brother Roger in Rome

■ "To welcome Christ who loves us; to love Christ in the communion of love which is the Church; to make ourselves available to Christ who send us to our brothers and sisters: these are three basic attitudes so that we may undertake a pilgrimage of trust on this earth. For this reason, some of you travel from one continent to another and cover great distances. But all of you can be pilgrims of trust in the places where you live, where you work or study, within your families and in your parishes. In communion with the Church it is your task to act in the places where you are, for the sake of reconciliation and sharing, to build peace; in order to fight against injustices and in order to alleviate suffering."

Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's

... as pilgrims of trust across the earth

Meditating on the word

*These short readings,
taken from the midday
prayer in Taizé, can be
read several times during
the day. The references
indicate longer readings. If
you have time to read only
one, the one in bold type is
suggested.*

May

This song of the merciful love of God gives us a key for understanding Jesus' beatitude: "Happy the pure in heart..." (Mt 5.8). There is no danger that the psalmist may think purity of heart to be a consequence of human effort. On the contrary, he is very conscious of his limits and the lack of harmony between the reality of his life and what the Lord asks of him. "My sin is always before me" (v. 3). He knows too that exterior ritual does not give God any pleasure (v. 16), but rather "sincerity of heart" (v. 6). From these depths all the rest of life comes (cf. Lk 6.43-45).

But how can we discover this essential clearness of heart? For the psalmist, it can only be the work of God within him, the effect of God's "unfailing love" and unbounded goodness. Full of trust, he dares to make his prayer in these words: "Create in me a clean heart, O God..." (v. 10). And God's forgiveness is thus revealed not to be just an attitude or feeling, but a creative act by which a new beginning becomes possible within the life of a human being (v. 13-15).

Finally the psalmist has this radiant intuition: "Sacrifice (pleasing) to God is a broken spirit, a contrite heart." (v. 17). This is not a doleful attitude, as it might seem at first sight, it does not involve scorn of self or a wish for self-destruction. The person with a broken heart is a someone who recognises their own limits and who knows that they need God's continual mercy in order to live. A "broken" spirit is the opposite of arrogant self-sufficiency; it implies availability and inward openness. In fact, it is the attitude of the tax collector in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18.9-14).

Questions for reflection: What biblical pictures or parables help us to understand God's merciful love? How can we root our lives in this merciful love? In this psalm, a "pure heart" and a "broken heart" are two faces of one reality: how can this be so?

1 SUN Acts 9.26-31
John 15.1-8
When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. **1 John 3.18-24**

2 Mon Exodus 3.1-6
Jn 5.41,43-44
The wisdom that comes from above is pure, peaceable, kindly and considerate; it is full of mercy and shows itself by doing good; nor is there is any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it.

James 3.13,16-18

3 Tue Jm 4.4-12
Jn 14.1-10a
The Lord says: I have seen the misery of my people. I have heard them crying for help because of their oppressors, yes, I am aware of their sufferings.

Ex 3.7-12

4 Wed Ex 3.13-14
Jn 14.10b-14
Be patient, do not lose heart. Do not grumble against each other, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves.

Jm 5.7-9a

5 Thu Jm 5.10-16
Jn 14.15-21
Moses said to God, "I have never been eloquent." But the Lord said to him, "Go now, I shall help you speak and teach you what to say."

Ex 4.10-15

6 Fri Ex 6.5-9
Jn 14.23-26
God is faithful, and has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1.1-10

7 Sat Ex 13.17-22
Jesus said: Peace I leave you, my own peace I give you; a peace that the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

Jn 14.27-29

8 SUN Ac 10.25-48
1 Jn 4.7-10
Jesus said: You did not choose me, no, I chose you and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit.

Jn 15.9-17

9 Mon 1 Cor 1.17-25
Jn 15.1-5
Moses said to the people: Do not be afraid! Stand firm, and you will see what God will do to rescue you today.

Ex 14.11-14

10 Tue Ex 15.1-2,13
Jn 15.7-12
God chose those who by human standards are weak to shame the strong; he chose those who, in the world, count for nothing.

1 Cor 1.26-31

11 Wed Ex 16.2-36
Mark 16.1-7
We announce what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of man cannot visualize; all that God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Cor 2.1-9

12 Thu Ac 1.1-11
Mk 16.15-20
ASCENSION
May God enlighten the eyes of your heart for you to see what hope his call holds for you.

Ephesians 1.17-23

13 Fri Ex 19.3-6
Jn 15.18-21
We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

1 Cor 2.10-16

14 Sat Ex 20.1-3,12-17
Jesus said to his disciples: When the Spirit of truth comes, who issues from the Father, he will bear witness to me.

Jn 15.26-16.4

15 SUN Ac 1.15-26
1 Jn 4.11-16
Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: Keep those whom you have given me in your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

Jn 17.11-19

16 Mon Ex 22.20-21,24 Jn 16.5-15
1 Cor 3.1-9
Fix your eyes on God and your face will grow bright, you will never hang your head in shame.

Ps 34

17 Tue Ex 33.12-17
1 Cor 3.10-16
Jesus said to his disciples: You are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you.

Jn 16.16-23a

18 Wed Ex 33.18-23
Jn 16.23b-33
Paul writes: Everything belongs to you; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

1 Cor 3.18-23

19 Thu Ex 34.29-33
1 Cor 4.1-5
After Jesus' Ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

Lk 24.49-53

20 Fri Ex 40.36-38
Jn 17.1-8
Paul writes: When we are cursed, we answer with a blessing; when we are persecuted, we endure it, when we are slandered, we answer kindly.

1 Cor 4.6b-13

21 Sat Jn 17.18-26
The Lord says: I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity.

Joel 3.1-5

22 SUN Ac 2.1-11
Jn 15.26-16.15
PENTECOST
Paul writes: Be guided by the Spirit, and you will not be under the Law. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness ... trustfulness and self-control; no law can touch things such as these.

Galatians 5.16-25

23 Mon Hosea 2.16-22
Ac 2.14-21
Jesus, as he realised that they were about to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountainside alone.

Jn 6.1-15

24 Tue Ac 2.36-41
Jn 6.16-21
Let us strive to know the Lord; that he will come is as certain as the dawn. He will come to us like a shower, like the rain of springtime to the earth.

Hos 6.1-6

25 Wed Ac 4.32-35
Jn 6.22-27
Sow in justice and reap a harvest of faithful love. It is time to seek out the Lord.

Hos 10.12

26 Thu Hos 11.1-4
1 Cor 4.14-17
The crowd said to Jesus, "What must we do to carry out God's work?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Jn 6.28-35

27 Fri Hos 11.7-9
1 Cor 7.29-31
Jesus said: I have come not to do my will, but the will of the One who sent me.

Jn 6.37-40

28 Sat Jn 6.41-50
I will love my people with all my heart, says the Lord, and I shall cure them of their disloyalty.

Hos 14.2-6

29 SUN Deuteronomy 4.32-40
Romans 8.14-17
The Risen Christ said: Look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.

Matthew 28.16-20

30 Mon Amos 5.4-24
Jn 6.51-58
Paul writes: Preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, it is a necessity for me.

1 Cor 9.16-23

31 Tue Am 7.12-15
1 Cor 9.24-27
Seeing that many people were forsaking him, Jesus asked the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Jn 6.60-69

Meditating on the word

1 Wed Amos 8.11 John 7.14-18
1 Cor 10.1-13
In the daytime God sends his faithful love, and even at night; the song it inspires in me is a prayer to the God of my life. Ps 42

2 Thu Jonah 2.2-10
Jn 7.24-30
The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share in the one loaf.

1 Cor 10.16-17

3 Fri Micah 2.12-13
1 Cor 10.23-24,31-11.1
Jesus cried out: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! Jn 7.37-44

4 Sat Jn 8.1-11
Days will come when many peoples will come and say: "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so that he may teach us his ways." And they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into bill-hooks.

Mi 4.1-4

5 SUN Ex 24.3 Mark 14.12-16,22-26
Hebrews 9.11-15
I rise before dawn and cry for help. I put my hope in your word, Lord. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night to ponder your promise. Ps 119.145-152

6 Mon Mi 5.1-4a
1 Cor 11.23-26
Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life. Jn 8.12-16

7 Tue Mi 6.1-5
Jn 8.26b-30
There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord; there are different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. 1 Cor 12.1-6

8 Wed 1 Cor 12.7-11
Jn 8.31-36
This is what the Lord wants of you, only this: to act with justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Mi 6.6-8

9 Thu Mi 7.18-20
Jn 8.50-54,56-59
Just as the body is one although it has many parts, so it is with Christ. 1 Cor 12.12-22

10 Fri 1 Cor 12.26-31
Jn 9.1-9
The Lord is good. He recognises those who trust in him even in times of trouble. Nahum 1.7-8a

11 Sat Jn 9.24-38
I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me and said: "The upright will live through faithfulness." Habak 1.2-3,12-13;2.1-4

12 SUN Ezekiel 17.22-24
2 Cor 5.6-10
Jesus said: This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, whether he is awake or asleep, the seed sprouts and grows without him knowing how. Mk 4.26-34

13 Mon Lamentations 3.22-26
Mk 1.1-8
Even if I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, even if I have a faith that can move mountains, if I am without love then I am nothing. 1 Cor 13.1-7

14 Tue 1 Cor 13.8-13
Mk 1.9-13
You came near when I called you, Lord, and you said, "Do not be afraid." Lm 3.55-58

15 Wed Proverbs 3.3-7
1 Cor 15.1-11
Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel. Mk 1.14-20

16 Thu Pr 3.27-31
1 Cor 15.12-20
Jesus taught in the synagogue. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. Mk 1.21-28

17 Fri Pr 4.18,20-27
Mk 1.35-39
Paul writes: If Christ has not been raised then our message is empty and so is your faith. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. For just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life. 1 Cor 15.12-28

18 Sat Pr 8.22-23,27-31
Mk 1.40-45
My hope is in you, Lord, save me from my sins. I keep silence, I will speak no more, since it is you who are at work. Ps 39

19 SUN Job 38.8-11
Mk 4.35-41
Christ died for all people, that those who live should live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised to life for them. 2 Cor 5.14-17

20 Mon 1 Cor 15.42-58
Mk 2.1-12
Happy is the one who trusts in the Lord and is attentive to the Word. Pr 16.9,19-20,32

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

21 Tue Pr 23.15-18
Acts 9.31-35
Jesus said: I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Mk 2.13-17

22 Wed Ac 9.36-42 Mk 2.18-22
Pr 30.5-9
The salvation of the just comes from God. He is their refuge in times of trouble. Ps 37

23 Thu Leviticus 19.1,2,15-18
Mk 2.23-3.6
Peter said: I now really understand that God has no favourites, but that in every nation he loves those who revere him and act with justice. Ac 10.24-28,34-35

24 Fri Luke 1.57-66,80
Mk 3.7-19
ST JOHN-THE-BAPTIST
I thought, "My toil has been futile. I have exhausted myself for nothing." Yet all the while my cause was with the Lord and my reward with my God. Isaiah 49.1-6

25 Sat Mk 3.20-27
God says: The foreigners living with you in your land must be treated as those who are native-born. Love them as yourself — for you yourselves were once aliens. Leviticus 19.33-34

26 SUN Wisdom 1.13-2.24
Mk 5.21-43
Be generous, for you know the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor for your sake. 2 Cor 8.7-15

27 Mon Lv 26.11-13
Ac 10.44-11.3,15-18
Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. Mk 3.31-35

28 Tue Num 6.22-26 Ac 13.28-33,38-39
Mk 4.1-9
You hold me by my right hand, Lord; you guide me by your counsel. And earth has nothing I desire besides you. Ps 73

29 Wed Ac 12.1-11
2 Timothy 4.6-8,17-18
SS PETER AND PAUL
Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Simon Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mt 16.13-19

30 Thu Nb 11.24-29
Ac 13.44-49
Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, hear the word, accept it, and bear much fruit. Mk 4.13-20

Johannine Hours

1 Samuel 3.1-10

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day (if possible, two days in the same week) take a couple of hours to read the Bible passages with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Samuel is only a child. There is nothing in the way he acts to prepare that he is to receive a communication from God. But one night, in his bed, he hears someone calling him by name. He is ready and willing to respond and he goes to Eli the priest who however had not called him. It is only after the third time that the young Samuel understands, with Eli's help, that it is God who is calling and he replies, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

In the Bible, a name holds a person's whole identity. God alone is able to call us by our true name, since he alone knows the ground of our being. Indeed, his calling is an invitation to discover our real identity during a pilgrimage made in company with him. It is a pressing invitation ("Samuel, Samuel!"), and one which is repeated, for God never forsakes us.

Sometimes we too, when we hear the gentle resonance of God's call in the midst of our night, mistake its origin. We try to respond, but do not know very well how to set about it. We are like Jesus' disciples when they say to him that they do not know the way to go to join him (cf. John 14.4-5).

It can be essential for us to discover someone like Eli, another believer, perhaps a man or woman who is already old: someone who can listen to us and who can help us read God's calling deep within ourselves; someone who can help us become what we are: servants of God.

Questions for reflection
Through what events is God calling me? What is the name known only to him, that God has given me? How can I better hear God's calling? Who has played the role of Eli in my life? A servant is not a slave but someone who acts in place of another: what does it mean for me to be a "servant of God"?

• I receive the Letter from Taizé: yes / no



Listening to the CONTINENTS

CENTRAL AMERICA

A young teacher from Central America arrived in Europe at the end of December. First of all, he was welcomed for ten days by a parish in Madrid, then he participated in the European Meeting in Rome. He told of his own way of life, the life of his small community, the "house of Nazareth" and how they decided to send someone to create a more visible link with the many other young "pilgrims of trust on earth".

"It was at the age of twenty, in Mexico, that I first read the Letter from Taizé. At that time, I was very much affected by the assassination of my father. He had been living in exile, and was arrested whilst trying to come back to our country.

I studied in Mexico. I went through some very dark moments there. The Church was for me a cold and distant reality, it was a period of doubt. From the moment that I discovered the Letter from Taizé. It became a first sign of hope for me.

Returning to my country, I suggested to a friend that we should live together in a very simple house. It would have been easier to remain with my family: I didn't have much money and it costs a lot to rent a house. In addition, it needed to be cleaned and repainted; it was an abandoned farmhouse. When I arrived there was only one cupboard, two stools and three planks of wood which became my bed during the first months.

After a good month's work, my friend had enough courage to come and join me. It was at this moment that the letter in which Brother Roger and Mother Teresa called each person to transform his or her home into a house of Nazareth arrived. The name of our house comes from this. A short time after this, we welcomed eight young people who had just been exiled from El Salvador. From the next day onwards the question arose: how are we going to find food for them? I told this to my pupils and it was them who brought rice, maize and vegetables. We lacked nothing. One day a widow came to ask us for help: she no longer had anywhere to live. We lent her a room. She lives there with her four children. Also, each day, morning and evening, about ten elderly people come to eat.

For the moment, we are three and we live by sharing our incomes. Each morning, we get up at five o'clock to pray together. At midday we go together to the mass at the cathedral and in the evenings, the prayer at our house is open to all. On Fridays we have a prayer of adoration around the cross.

We also have many links with our parish, where the priest places trust in us. The parish is made up of an urban part and a huge rural part with 90 small villages, around twenty thousand people in all. The priest has a lot of trust in us and has entrusted about fifteen of these villages to two of us. The third works at the catechism centre. We visit each village once or twice a month. The nearest is six hours walk from our house, which means twelve hours there and back.

When we arrive in a village, we gather the young people together to share. This means above all a time of instruction on the Bible and in humanities, and of reflection on the sense of community and on prayer. We rely very much on the meditations in the *Letter from Taizé*. Then I meet with the catechists and give them a programme. It is they who then go to visit the houses, the sick, and who animate the prayer throughout the week. In each little village there is a chapel where people pray every day. In each village, up to ten catechists share these tasks.

On feast days, we prepare with the catechists a celebration of the word and then a thanksgiving and offertory prayer. People always bring something from their gardens or the harvest for the poorest people of the village or elsewhere or for the old people or for the orphans. We can't stay overnight in the villages for there is much violence, sometimes soldiers or "guerilleros" arrive during the night... The situation is so tense that people don't want us to stay. Sometimes we wanted to insist on staying to have a prayer vigil, but they prefer that we leave.

Presently, the situation is changing a little: violence is being rejected. There has been much suffering, almost every family has been affected by the violence in one way or another. It has broken some and dispersed others in exile. Violence destroys our culture and values: not only life but the richness of life. We have undertaken a reflection on non-violence, with the examples of Gandhi, Luther King or Oscar Romero.

A hope has been born. We are searching how to go on in keeping a unity and maintaining trust. For example, the young people of families victimised by the army have started to visit soldiers in hospital, to bring them flowers. They were so touched and filled with joy. We believe that this is the only way that our people may live. A short time ago, two young people engaged in the campaign for peace were killed. When their assassination was discovered - they had also been tortured - all the groups of young people went in silence to the burial asking that the violence cease and human rights be respected. A new consciousness has been born in the groups who share the Word. We visited the families and that was the hardest: how can you ask a mother to be patient when her son has been killed? Because of this, we search for solidarity between the groups. During Lent last year, we made a pilgrimage of reconciliation through the whole town.

A service of legal aid is provided by the catholic university. The clinics and schools where most people go are animated by the Church. The Church calls upon us, the young people, and she supports us. At this time, there is a series of grants available to help young indians to study. I myself am working on an extra-mural programme which takes place outside of the university: my students are adult indians. The project is to help them to discover their richness, the values of their culture and their faith.

My arrival in Taizé is the fruit of the work of the group of animators and my community. For one year, fifty people have made economies pay for the plane ticket. It was difficult because we don't have much money, we have to buy food and also the materials for the catechism, was a very important experience. Several times we could have used the money for other things but it's such a long time since we joined the pilgrimage of trust. For us it was important to join concretely. So we worked hard but only succeeded in collecting half the money for the ticket because the prices were rising... We decided to buy the ticket on credit, despite the highest interest rates. Then we chose who would be sent. After a celebration and two hours of prayer, the priest drew by lots a name from an earthenware jar. And it was my name that came out. When I came to paying for the ticket, I was very nervous thinking of all that we lacked and what we would have been able to buy with the money. But this journey was necessary. It was like a struggle to remain faithful, to continue as a pilgrim. Fifty people accompanied me to the airport, five hours bus ride from our house.

Our faith has made us into people, a sensitive people. When someone suffers, he is never alone, there is always solidarity. I have experienced this. A proof of it is the welcome I was given in Europe: it's as if I have already received a hundred times over all that we gave in preparing this pilgrimage. I am more decided now than ever to continue on the path of faith and not to abandon the sources that God has placed within me: and also not to go forward alone. I know what the nights of humanity are and I know what it means to go forward in the darkness. I know that the dawn often takes a long time to come. I am going to continue in my community to pray and to seek the unity of the Kingdom of God.

It's really true that a springtime is coming. In our country, like many other countries in the South affected by poverty and violence for so long, there is an ardent expectation of peace and justice, a springtime of life is preparing itself. Here in Europe, I grasped it at once during the European Meeting in Rome, we see a great thirst for prayer, for trust. A springtime of the faith is arriving, a springtime of the Church.

Letter from Taizé

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Letter 139 · DRA Comm. de Taizé · Com. par. 50795 · DL 67
Les Presses de Taizé